is its courtyard, some fifty acres, with a well in the center. From this point the walls around the field looked like a hedge. High above them ran the skyline of forested hills. In summer all the trees looked alike, and it was difficult to distinguish differences in the shades of green. As fall approached, the colors began to change. Some patches of the green velvet became lighter, others darker. Then brown and red spots appeared overnight and turned into flashes of gold. Next, the golden sparks began to grow and expand until they merged into a conflagration. Strolling in the courtyard, I felt as near to the taiga as if I were wandering among the cedars and larches.

IN THE WORK GANG

The Russian penal system was full of contradictions. It included the grim Ekaterinoslav Castle and the cozy Novgorod prison, the torture chambers of Orel, and the samovars in Alexandrovsk. Siberian penitentiaries belonged to the brighter side of the picture. From the beginning of the nineteenth century they played an important role in the colonization of Siberia. Convicts, after serving one third of their term, were usually transferred to work gangs and housed in barracks outside the stockade. Most of them were employed in the fields and workshops of the prison or in mines. After thus serving the second third of their term, they could be settled in a village and might acquire land and become farmers. After the turn of the century, the prison population had outgrown the penitentiaries' demand for labor. Siberian prisons still had work gangs, but most of the prisoners sentenced to forced labor were kept in confinement and idleness, exactly as in European Russia.

In Alexandrovsk the work gangs were employed mainly in the fields around the prison, for woodcutting, repair and maintenance jobs, and the like. They also included gardeners, stable hands, coachmen, clerks, and—last but not least—musicians, singers, and dancers to entertain the administration. Though prisoners in the work gang wore prison garb and slept in the barracks, they could go to the village with oral permission from the chief guard.

During an inspection visit to Alexandrovsk, the Governor General, Kniazev, noticed that only the common criminals were working outdoors and asked the superintendent the reason for this discrimination against the politicals. When the superintendent answered that he knew of no legal ground for this practice, Kniazev instructed his counsel, Batarevich, to look into the question. The latter reported that the law made no distinction between the political convicts and others, and Kniazev ordered the superintendent to apply the law to